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Hecht favors Sandinista overthrow

By Bill Gertz
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A member of the Senate Intelligence Committee says he opposes negotiations with the Marxist Sandinista regime, and favors its overthrow.

"We should bring them to the [negotiating] table and then take the table over and have democracy there, not a communist dictatorship," Sen. Chic Hecht, Nevada Republican, said in an interview.

Breaking ranks with committee chairman David Durenberger, Minnesota Republican, Mr. Hecht said he "absolutely" favors President Reagan's \$100 million aid package, which includes \$70 million in discretionary funds for weapons to Nicaraguan resistance forces fighting the Marxist Sandinista regime.

"If we don't help people in Nicaragua, or any country, with arms and

ammunition to help themselves, eventually American troops are going to have to be sent down there," said Mr. Hecht, a former Army intelligence officer who spent 18 months as a linguist in East Germany during the 1950s. "We cannot allow another Soviet state in Central America."

Mr. Durenberger has expressed reservations about the president's aid request.

But Mr. Hecht said of the Nicaraguan rebels, "These people want to fight for themselves, this is what it's all about."

He said Soviet military aid to Nicaragua over the last year reached "staggering" levels.

The Soviet arms shipments included new deliveries of advanced Mi-24 attack helicopters,

"We know that Soviet equipment is going into Nicaragua via Cuba," Mr. Hecht said. "I have been briefed

on that lately and it's a staggering amount."

He said the Sandinistas have been "devastating" the rebels with the attack helicopters, sometimes called "flying tanks" because of their thick armor and massive firepower.

Mr. Hecht said it is important that the United States not only provide enough aid to the resistance fighters, but also that it make certain that aid continue in a consistent way.

"On this \$100 million, I just think we have to make sure we're doing enough because there is nothing worse than getting your allies on target, and not fulfilling an obligation to continue right on down the line," Mr. Hecht said. "You cannot ask people to go on and risk their lives on a 90-day basis. We have to continue this, we have to make provisions to continue this aid for the freedom fighters in Nicaragua."

Mr. Hecht would not say what the chances are for the aid package passing the committee, but criticized the House for its turnaround on aid to the rebels last year.

"It seems inconceivable to me that House members [last year] voted against aid and then the next day [Sandinista leader Daniel] Ortega went to Moscow and celebrated, and they said, 'Hey, maybe this guy does have communist leanings,'" Mr. Hecht said.

Mr. Hecht said he favors supplying the rebels with weapons that will defend against helicopter attacks.

"As the president has said, these Soviet attack helicopters are heavily armed and tough to shoot down," he said. "You can't shoot them down with a bottle of aspirin — humanitarian aid will not shoot down a Soviet attack helicopter. They are devastating, they are absolutely devastating."